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AUTHOR Miller, Howard F.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the academic success rate of New Jersey community college transfer students at receiving senior institutions in New Jersey, statewide transfer data were examined for 1,523 full-time transfer juniors in the 1974-75 school year. Transfer students earned a grade point average (GPA) of 2.8 prior to transfer, compared with 2.9 for their junior year. By the end of their junior year, transfers had earned a 3.0 GPA at public and a 2.9 GPA at independent colleges, compared with a 2.9 and 2.8, respectively, for non-transfer or "native" students. Three year cumulative GPA averaged 2.8 for both native and transfer students at public and private colleges. Examination of junior year GPA distributions for transfers revealed that 11% earned less than 2.0, 48% earned a GPA between 2.0 and 2.9, and 41% averaged a 3.0 to 4.0 GPA. In addition, 83% of those transfer students who had been graduated with a two-year college GPA between 2.0 and 2.4, and 98% who averaged between 3.5 and 4.0, earned better than a 2.0 in the receiving institution. Credits attempted during spring 1975 at public four-year colleges averaged 15.4, with an average of 15.0 credits earned, leaving a credit difference of .4; a similar pattern was observed during the second semester of the junior year at independent senior institutions, indicating satisfactory completion of most course work. (RT)

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RESEARCH REPORT 77-2

THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES IN NEW JERSEY FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

July, 1977

PREPARED BY:

Howard F. Miller
Robin Janawsky
Adolph Katz

JC 770 421

OFFICE OF RESEARCH
Adolph Katz
Director

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THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES IN NEW JERSEY FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

SUMMARY

New Jersey two-year colleges have opened alternative routes to the baccalaureate degree for many who choose to pursue the first two years of study close to home, at a relatively low cost. Until recently, however, assessments of the effectiveness of this avenue of access have depended upon inferences from isolated and exceptional cases.

This report presents the results of the first systematic attempt by the Department of Higher Education to answer the question: How do two-year college graduates perform academically in the four-year colleges to which they transfer? While the study is limited by some incompleteness in the data, in the main it supports several major findings:

1. As a group, graduates of New Jersey two-year colleges perform as well in the four-year institutions as the students who enrolled there as freshmen.* This finding is based on the following points:

   a. The grade point averages (GPAs) of transfer graduates in their junior year compared favorably with the GPAs of native juniors, and

   b. Approximately 89% of the transfer students holding associate degrees had earned at least a "C" average (2.0) by the end of their junior year.

2. Although preliminary data suggested that two-year college students experience a mild drop in grade point average one semester after transfer-- the so-called "transfer shock," -- further analysis indicated that approximately as many students show increases in GPA after transfer as decreases.

3. Better academic performance at the two-year colleges tended to enhance one's chances of success at the four-year college. For example,

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*However, performance differences exist among students graduating from different two-year colleges and among groups attending various four-year colleges.

83% of transfer students graduating with a cumulative GPA between 2.0 and 2.4 at the two-year colleges earned a 2.0 or greater in their junior year at the four-year college; 98% of two-year college graduates transferring with between a 3.5 and 4.0 cumulative GPA earned a 2.0 or higher.

4. It is feasible to establish a statewide system for the pooling of information on the academic performance of two-year college transfer students in the four-year colleges. Such information already has assisted both the institutions and the Department of Higher Education in determining the ability of the two-year colleges to provide viable avenues of access to education beyond the associate degree. Nonetheless, if the data-sharing system is to be effective over the longer term, it must be simplified appreciably.

I. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the community college as an institution of expanding educational opportunity is among the more significant developments in twentieth century American higher education. Since the passage of its enabling legislation in 1962, the New Jersey community college has accommodated increasing numbers of students who, for financial, academic, socioeconomic, geographic, and other reasons did not previously have access to a college education. More specifically, the community colleges have opened avenues to occupational training, remedial services, adult and continuing education, and the first two years of college for those aspiring to the baccalaureate and beyond.

As the community college concept gained acceptance and the numbers of students transferring to a four-year college grew, representatives of both the New Jersey Department of Higher Education and the county colleges recognized the need to assess outputs and to identify problems encountered by students who transferred to a senior institution. As a result, a statewide Transfer Articulation Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all New Jersey colleges, was established in 1974. The Committee decided that three major questions should be addressed: (1) How many students transfer, where do they come from, and where do they go?[1]; (2) What barriers do transfer

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[1] DHE Research Report #76-1 provided information on the numbers of students transferring from two- to four-year colleges in New Jersey in 1973 and 1974. An updated report, to include numbers transferring in 1975, 1976, and projections for Fall 1977, is in preparation.

students encounter?[2]; and (3) How do two-year college graduates perform academically in the four-year colleges? This report is an initial response to the third question concerning the academic success of transfer students.

A. Statement of the Problem

The traditions of autonomy and local control that characterize higher education institutions have resulted in closely guarded prerogatives in matters of admissions policies and curriculum development. Yet, a statewide commitment in New Jersey to an open dialogue concerning the problems of transfer students has had positive effect. According to representatives of the annual Transfer Clearinghouse, all associate degree graduates of approved transfer curricula who sought to enter the upper division of a New Jersey four-year college in the last six years have been accommodated, indicating that one fundamental condition of access--the opportunity to enroll--has been met. However, access must be more than the opportunity to enroll. When qualified and motivated students enter college but fail to progress, the true objective of access is not being fulfilled.

To date, New Jersey educational planners and administrators at both the state and institutional levels have guessed at the extent to which transfer students succeed academically after receiving the associate degree. The present study was undertaken to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge about their achievement.

B. Definitions

The following definitions, used throughout the report, are presented to assist the reader:

Transfer Students. Students moving from a two-year to a four-year college within New Jersey.

Transfer Graduates. A transfer student who has earned an associate degree (AA, AS, or AAS) at a two-year college prior to transferring.

Sending College. The two-year college in which the transfer student undertook the first two years of study toward the baccalaureate.

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[2]Specific initatives have been taken to isolate the problems associated with the transfer of courses and credits in the fields of nursing, business, and the industrial and engineering technologies.

Receiving College. The four-year college or university in which the transfer student is completing the baccalaureate.

Native Juniors. Students in their junior year who began their studies as freshmen at the same, four-year institution.

II. METHODOLOGY

The unit of focus in the study was the graduate of a New Jersey two-year college who enrolled in a New Jersey senior college as a full-time junior in the Fall of 1974. Of the 2,743 students who fit the definition statewide, some transfer data were provided for 1,523 (56%) students.[3]

Procedures for collecting data were developed in consultation with a statewide Interinstitutional Research Committee on Transfer Student Achievement. New Jersey public and independent senior colleges were asked to provide information identifying the two-year college students who transferred to their institutions in Fall 1974. A listing of students and their four-year college academic majors was sent early in 1976 to the two-year college liaison representatives who, in turn, provided the Department of Higher Education with sending college grade point average data for each student. Concurrently, the receiving colleges advised the Department concerning transfer student achievement in their institutions as of the spring semester, 1975.[4] All student records were keypunched, a master computer file created by the New Jersey Educational Computer Network, and reports generated.

As you will note, analyses in the report are based on fewer than 1,523 students, since transfer data from both the sending and receiving college were not provided for each student. (See Appendix A.)

Before proceeding to a discussion of findings, several limitations should be noted:

-- Because of missing data elements and non-participation by several institutions, information about

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[3]See Appendix A for information about participating institutions and a discussion of the study sample.

[4]An opinion of the New Jersey Attorney General indicated that the data-sharing procedure would not violate the intent of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Law (The "Buckley Amendment").

specific institutions has been excluded from this report.[5] With the exception of the cases in which no student data were obtained from institutions that elected not to participate, missing records appear to have occurred at random.

-- Although it has been possible to compute the grade point averages of native juniors from data supplied by the colleges, other descriptors of native juniors, such as averages of credits attempted and credits earned, were not available.

-- Grade point averages, used as the principal measure of student achievement in the study, have been rounded to one decimal place in order to discourage conclusions that exceed the capacity of the data.

-- Cautions should be exercised in the use of grade point average data in the study since trends toward grade inflation cast doubt upon the GPA as a valid measure of attainment.

III. FINDINGS

The academic performance of transfer graduates was evaluated in several ways:

(1) By comparing grade point averages of transfer students at their sending colleges with GPA's at their receiving colleges;

(2) By comparing the grade point averages of transfer juniors with the same data for native juniors;

(3) By determining the percentage of transfer graduates earning above a "C" average (2.0) in their junior year; and

(4) By comparing the number of credits attempted with the number earned, in Spring 1975.

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[5]Data comparing each institution with the average for its sector have been shared with the individual colleges.

A. GPA's Before and After Transfer

A comparison of a transfer student's junior year GPA with the GPA earned at the sending college may reveal the extent to which sucessful transition has occurred. In their review of the transfer research literature, Holmstrom and Bisconti (1973)[6] noted a predominant theme, "transfer shock," which suggests that, initially, two-year college transfer students do experience some difficulty in the transition, exhibited by a slight drop in GPA during the first semester in the upper division. Holmstrom and Bisconti also noted that the phenomenon has been challenged by researchers who suggest that the "shock" phenomenon may be more appropriately related to variations in grading practices among different institutions, irrespective of type (junior or senior, two-year or four-year.)

The results of the present study show that two-year college graduates earned an average GPA of 2.8 at the two-year colleges (Table I). The same students earned an average GPA of 2.9 for their junior year, which suggests that the academic performance of two-year college transfer graduates equals or slightly exceeds their performance at the two-year colleges. Furthermore, the data in the aggregate do not reveal evidence of "shock" since transfer students, on the average, maintained the same GPA (2.8) in their first semester of transfer as at the sending college.

The data may lend some credence to the notion that differences in grading standards may explain the existence of "transfer shock", where it occurs, since students from half of the sending colleges do show a decrease in GPA upon transfer (i.e., "shock"), while students from the other half show increases.

Table I

GPA'S OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE TRANSFER GRADUATES
AT BOTH SENDING AND RECEIVING COLLEGES

(n = 618)

Transfer Student GPA at Two-Year (Sending) College (1)	Transfer Student GPA Junior Year at Receiving College			Index of "Shock" (1)-(2)
	First Semester GPA (2)	Second Semester GPA (3)	Junior Yr. Average GPA (4)	
2.8	2.8	3.0	2.9	.0

[6]Holmstrom, E. I. and Bisconti, A.S. Transfers from Junior to Senior Colleges. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1974.

B. GPA's of Native and Transfer Juniors

Using Spring semester grades as a measure, transfer graduates performed slightly better academically than native students. The Spring semester GPA of native juniors was 2.9 while the comparable average for transfer juniors was 3.0 (Table II).

Table II

SECOND SEMESTER GPA FOR TRANSFER AND NATIVE JUNIORS, SPRING 1975

Receiving Sector	Native Juniors		Transfer Juniors	
	GPA	N	GPA	N
Public Colleges	2.9	5,670	3.0	494
Independent Colleges	2.8	2,974	2.9	73
TOTAL	2.9	8,644	3.0	567

When the cumulative GPAs (CGPA) as of the completion of the junior year are compared, a similar result obtains: Transfer graduates perform on a par with native juniors (Table III), although individual differences exist among colleges.

Table III

THREE-YEAR CUMULATIVE GPA FOR TRANSFERS AND NATIVE JUNIORS

Receiving Sector	Native Juniors		Transfer Juniors*	
	CGPA	N	CGPA	N
Public Colleges	2.8	7,604	2.8	799
Independent Colleges	2.8	4,022	2.8	77
TOTAL	2.8	11,626	2.8	876

*First two years of CGPA computed using the sending GPA as a proxy value.

C. Transfer Students Earning GPA 2.0 or Better

Another useful measure of the academic success of transfer graduates is the percentage of students earning above a "C" average at the conclusion of their junior year. (A GPA of 2.0 is considered an acceptable average and typically is a minimum requirement for graduation.) See Table IV on page 8.

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF JUNIOR YEAR GRADE POINT AVERAGES
FOR TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES AT THE RECEIVING COLLEGES*

Percentage of Students with Cumulative GPA: (N = 868)		
Less than 2.0	2.0 - 2.9	3.0 - 4.0
11%	48%	41%

*Comparable data not available for native students.

The data show that 89% of transfer graduates had earned a "C" average or better (2.0 or higher) during their first year in the senior institutions.

The study also supports conclusively the notion that students who perform better in the two-year colleges tend to perform better in the four-year colleges to which they transfer. For example, 83% of the students graduating with a GPA between 2.0 and 2.4 from the two-year college earned an average greater than 2.0 in the receiving colleges, while 98% of graduates with a sending GPA between 3.5 and 4.0 did so (Table V). These data suggest that students planning to transfer may be able to enhance their chances of completing the junior year by diligent attention to their studies at the two-year colleges.

Table V

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RECEIVING COLLEGE GPA
(JUNIOR YEAR) AND SENDING COLLEGE GPA

GPA at Sending College	(N)	Percentage of Transfer Graduates at the Receiving College* Earning GPA of:	
		2.0 or greater	3.0 or greater
2.0 - 2.4	(212)	83%	19%
2.5 - 2.9	(256)	91%	31%
3.0 - 3.4	(198)	96%	61%
3.5 - 4.0	(92)	98%	69%
	(N=758)		

* Comparable data not available for native students.

C. Credits Attempted vs. Credits Earned

The relationship between the number of credits attempted in a given semester and the number earned may be viewed as an indicator of transfer student success in that a minimal loss of credits implies a high rate of completion of attempted course work. Table VI shows that transfers lost an average of about half of a credit (.4) while pursuing their second semester in Spring 1975.

Table VI

CREDITS ATTEMPTED VS. CREDITS EARNED IN SPRING 1975

BY	Average Credits Attempted	Average Credits Earned	Credit Difference	N
Sending Sector				
Public Two-Year	15.4	15.0	-.4	564
Independent Two-Year*	--	--	--	
TOTAL	15.4	15.0	-.4	569
Receiving Sector				
Public Four-Year	15.4	15.0	-.4	496
Independent Four-Year	15.2	14.7	-.5	73
TOTAL	15.4	15.0	-.4	569

* Ns too low for separate analysis.

While course failures by some transfer students may explain the loss of .4 credits, it is also possible that some students' grade files were not up to date at the time the study data were collected. In the latter case, the effect on the average number of credits earned would be the same as failing a course. It is impossible to determine how much of the credit loss is due to course failure and how much to clerical lag. It is clear, however, that two-year college graduates satisfactorily completed virtually all course work during the second semester of their junior year. Although no data on semester credits attempted and earned by native students were available, informal discussion with college administrators indicates that native students do not differ substantially from transfers in this regard.

Without comparable data on native juniors, a comparison of credits attempted with credits earned by transfer graduates is not a key measure of academic success. However, in conjunction with other indicators, the small number of credits lost confirms the picture of community college transfer student success at the senior institutions.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A. Conclusion

The findings of this study lead to the general conclusion that the two-year college appears to be an effective pathway to the upper division for New Jersey two-year college graduates who choose to pursue the baccalaureate. In a subsequent phase of the study, the extent to which students persist to graduation will be determined. Furthermore, insofar as satisfactory transfer student achievement in the upper division of the senior institutions can be viewed as a measure of access to post-secondary education, it appears that one of the aims of the New Jersey Master Plan (Phase II)--that the community colleges serve as an open door to higher education in New Jersey--is being served.

B. Recommendations for Further Study

It is not uncommon that studies such as this raise more questions than they answer. Among the noteworthy issues for further investigation are the following:

1. What are the attrition/completion rates of transfer graduates in the four-year colleges?

   It is recommended that the Department of Higher Education, in conjunction with the Interinstitutional Advisory Committee on Transfer Student Achievement, continue to refine the transfer data base in order to obtain reliable attrition/completion data for transfer students at the senior institutions.

2. How does the academic performance of transfer students vary by their program of study at the two-year college?

   While it is known that there is variability in achievement among transfer graduates from different community colleges, the extent to which graduates of different community college curricula vary in academic performance could not be determined in the present study. Therefore, the transfer achievement data base should be refined and examined further to isolate the two-year college curricula from which students loose credit or show decidedly inferior academic performance.

3. How can a statewide data-sharing system be made more useful and manageable?

   It is recommended that a high priority be given to revamping the original data-sharing system to the end that it provide useful information in a timely way. At the very least, this would require a rethinking about which data will serve the needs of the institutions and the Department of Higher Education, and a reappraisal of the best way to obtain reliable information.

APPENDIX A

A. Institutions Participating in the Study

Whereas each institution noted in Table A (p. 14) participated to some extent in the study, many did not provide all the critical information pertaining to each transfer student that was needed to generate reports (e.g., GPA in spring semester 1975, full-time/part-time status, sending college GPA, and the like).

The statistical analyses performed required either: 1) more than one piece of information for each student at the same point in time, 2) different pieces of information on the same students at different points in time, or 3) the same pieces of information on two different groups of students at the same time (and at the same colleges.) In satisfying these requirements, the number of student data records available for the analyses was reduced considerably from the original pool of over 1,500. As a result, tables presented in the text include data from some institutions and exclude data from others.*

This will become apparent to the reader as he/she peruses the text and notes that the Ns on which table findings are based vary from table to table. As described above, this is due in the main to the exclusion of some institutions, depending on data provided. For example, Table I is based on the 618 students for which all needed data were provided by both sending and receiving colleges. Table II, on the other hand, relies on comparisons of native juniors with transfer juniors at the same colleges. As such, there were 567 transfer students for whom we received both their spring 1975 GPA data and information from their colleges on the GPA's of native juniors. In sum, the more ways we aggregate student records where information is not complete for all students, the fewer students fill all designated criteria.

B. Representativeness of the Findings

The small Ns reported in the tables raise the question of the representativeness (and hence, the validity) of the study. The text of this report notes that 2,743 students actually transferred within New Jersey from a two-year to a four-year college in Fall 1974, enrolling full time. Of the 2,743, we received records on 1,523 students. Data in many of the tables in this report are based on sub-sets of the 1,523, ranging in size from 600 to 900 students.

In order to investigate the possibility of bias in the groups studied, we performed a χ^2 analysis on the distribution of one variable -- the split between AA/AS recipients and AAS recipients. Both the 1,523, and to a greater extent the 618 (the N in Table I), appear to be biased (significant at the .05 level, in both cases) in favor of the AAS graduate. That is, while only 9% of all

* The reader is directed to Table B (p. 15) for a listing, by table, of participating institutions.

transfer graduates enrolling full-time were AAS recipients, 11% of our entire study group had received the AAS degree, as had 21% of the students whose records were used for the analysis shown in Table I on page 6 of this report.

	100% (N)	% Distribution	
		AA/AS	AAS
Total Transfer Graduates	2,743	91%	9%
Some records reported	1,523	89%	11%
Table I records	618	79%	21%

Further analysis revealed that the AAS recipients had earned a GPA of 0.1 points lower than the AA/AS recipients. Therefore, in the aggregate, the GPAs reported for transfer graduates in this study may have underestimated the actual GPA performance of the 2,743 students.

Appendix A

Table A

Participants in the Transfer Student Achievement Study

1974 - 1975

RECEIVING COLLEGES	SENDING COLLEGES
Public Institutions:	**Public Institutions:**
Glassboro State College	Atlantic Community College
Jersey City State College	Bergen Community College
Kean College of New Jersey	Brookdale Community College
Montclair State College	Burlington County College
Ramapo College of New Jersey	Camden County College
Richard Stockton State College	Cumberland County College
Trenton State College	Essex County College
Wm. Paterson College of New Jersey	Gloucester County College
N.J.I.T.	Mercer County Community College
Rutgers, the State University	Middlesex County College
	County College of Morris
	Ocean County College
	Passaic County Community College
Independent Institutions:	Salem Community College
	Somerset County College
College of St. Elizabeth	Union College
Drew University	Union County Technical Institute
Fairleigh Dickinson University	
Felician College	
Georgian Court College	**Independent Institutions:**
Monmouth College	
Princeton University	Assumption College
St. Peter's College	Centenary College
Stevens Inst. of Technology	Edward Williams College
Upsala College	Luther College of the Bible

TABLE B

SENDING COLLEGES	Text Table No. I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Public Inst:						
Atlantic	1			1	1	1
Bergen	x			x	x	x
Brookdale	2			x	x	x
Burlington	x			x	x	x
Camden	x			x	x	x
Cumberland	x			x	x	x
Essex	x			x	x	x
Gloucester	x			x	x	x
Mercer	1			x	1	x
Middlesex	x			x	x	x
Morris	x			x	x	x
Ocean	x			x	x	x
Passaic	1			1	1	1
Salem	x			x	x	x
Somerset	x			x	x	x
Union	x			x	x	x
U.C.T.I.	1			1	1	1
Indep. Inst.:						
Assumption	3			3	3	3
Centenary	x			x	x	x
Edward Williams	x			x	x	x
Luther	1			1	1	1

RECEIVING COLLEGES	Text Table No. I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Public Inst:						
Glassboro	x	x	x	x	x	x
Jersey City	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kean	x	x	x	x	x	x
Montclair	x	4	4	x	x	x
Ramapo	1	4	4	1	1	1
Stockton	1	x	4	1	1	1
Trenton	x	4	x	x	x	x
Wm. Paterson	1	4	x	x	x	1
N.J.I.T.	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rutgers	1	4	4	1	x	1
Indep. Inst:						
Col. of St. Eliz.	x	x	x	x	3	x
Drew	x	x	x	x	x	x
FDU	x	x	x	x	x	x
Felician	1	4	4	1	1	1
Georgian Court	x	x	x	x	x	x
Monmouth	1	x	x	1	1	1
Princeton	3	4	4	3	3	1
St. Peter's	1	4	4	1	1	1
Stevens	1	4	4	1	1	1
Upsala	x	x	x	x	x	x

"x" appearing on the line next to each college and in the column under each Table number indicates that data from that institution were used in the analysis for that Table.

Footnotes: See page 16 for an explanation of each of the footnotes (1 through 5) shown in the above Table.

TABLE B

(FOOTNOTES)

[1] One or more of the data elements required for this table were not provided.

[2] Brookdale's grading system is not comparable with that of other Community Colleges.

[3] N's too low for inclusion in study.

[4] Comparable data were not available for "native juniors".

[5] Tables II and III were based on information supplied by the senior colleges; thus, data from two-year (sending) colleges not required for these tables.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

OCT 14 1977

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES